United Nations S/PV.7418

Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7418th meeting
Thursday, 26 March 2015, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Lamek	(France)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Gombo
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Jordan	Mr. Hmoud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaite
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/206)

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15-08517 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/206)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/206, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).

I now give the floor to Ms. Amos.

Ms. Amos: We are in the fifth year of a war in Syria characterized by breathtaking levels of savagery, and it is just over one year since the Council adopted resolution 2139 (2014). The resolution demanded action by the parties to the conflict to cease attacks against civilians and facilitate humanitarian access to those in need. We all had hoped that the resolution would compel the parties to reduce the violence and lead to a significant improvement in the situation of people in Syria. By any measure, however, the situation in Syria has dramatically worsened.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. The Secretary-General has submitted report after report highlighting the failure of the parties to meet their basic minimum legal obligations. Indiscriminate aerial bombings, including the use of barrel bombs, car bombs, mortar attacks, unguided rockets and the use of other explosive devices in populated areas, are the hallmarks of this conflict.

Fighting continues to escalate across the country. Increased violence in Idlib city in the past few days is particularly worrying and has the potential to displace hundreds of thousands more people. I am concerned that civilians could become trapped in the city if the fighting escalates. People must be given safe passage and be allowed to leave if this becomes necessary.

I have previously reported on the worsening socioeconomic situation in the country, which has eroded the development gains made over a generation. Today, a Syrian's life expectancy is estimated to be 20 years less than when the conflict started. Unemployment is around 58 per cent, up from around 10 per cent in 2010; and nearly two thirds of all Syrians are now estimated to be living in extreme poverty.

The inability of the Council and countries with influence over the different parties at war in Syria to agree on the elements for a political solution in the country means that the humanitarian consequences will continue to be dire for millions of Syrians.

Children are particularly badly affected, with 5.6 million children now in need of assistance. Well over 2 million children are out of school. A quarter of Syria's schools have been damaged, destroyed or taken over for shelter. It will take billions of dollars to repair damaged schools and restore the education system.

Nutritional surveys indicate a worrying decline in the nutritional status of children. Three governorates — Hama, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor — have global acute malnutrition rates above 10 per cent among the children sampled, a level considered serious according to World Health Organization standards. The overall country-wide global acute malnutrition rate was 7.2 per cent. This is considered to be poor.

The health system in Syria has been destroyed. Only half of the network of primary health centres that existed before the conflict are still working. Physicians for Human Rights has documented 233 attacks on 183 medical facilities, with 610 medical staff killed over the last four years.

Basic services continue to be deliberately attacked and cut. For example, some 450,000 people in Dar'a had their water cut for two weeks in February. Even when basic services are restored, people have only sporadic access owing to the systematic degradation of basic infrastructure. Non-governmental organizations reviewing satellite imagery report that 83 per cent of

the lights have gone out in Syria over the past four years. This is an average. The cuts are even higher in areas such as Aleppo.

As needs grow, humanitarian organizations need to reach more people, but we are facing increasing difficulties in reaching the 4.8 million people who live in areas which are hard to reach. And as the violence escalates and conflict lines continue to shift, I fear that these numbers will rise. Access continues to be constrained by insecurity and active fighting, but the parties to the conflict are increasingly and deliberately obstructing the delivery of life-saving aid.

In parts of the country under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a number of humanitarian offices have been closed. As a result, the World Food Programme was forced to halt distribution to 700,000 people in ISIL-controlled areas of Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations distributions in the northern governorates — the agricultural belt of the country — have also been reduced in the past months.

The Syrian Government continues to put in place restrictive administrative hurdles, hampering the effective delivery of aid, and have insisted that the United Nations share beneficiary lists. In February, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed the United Nations that all communications with Government ministries and public-service providers be routed through the Ministry. At a time when needs are growing and the humanitarian community should be scaling up its response, the Government continues to put in place measures that are not practical and slow down our response.

So far this year, the United Nations has requested access to 33 locations for the delivery of aid through inter-agency convoys; only three have been agreed, to Al Waer, Talbiseh and Al-Rastan in Homs. Despite the approval and support of the Governor, Syrian State security forces removed surgical and other medical and reproductive health supplies from the convoys to Al Waer and Talbiseh. Urgently needed medical supplies, including surgical kits, are scheduled to be delivered to Al-Rastan on 30 March. I ask the Council to make it clear to the Government of Syria that these convoys must be allowed to proceed and that their security forces should allow the free passage of all supplies to people in need.

There has been some confusion about the number of people in besieged and hard-to-reach locations. In besieged areas, people cannot leave and assistance cannot get in on a regular basis. In February, the United Nations could not deliver any food or medicines to besieged locations. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) restarted delivery of some assistance to Yarmouk on 4 March. However, food distribution takes place only three times a week, with around 200 families receiving parcels on each distribution day. UNRWA estimates that the 18,000 people trapped in Yarmouk require 400 food parcels daily to meet their basic needs. An additional 228,000 people are now living under siege in Government-controlled neighborhoods of Deir ez-Zor by ISIL. They are unable to leave the city, and only minimal supplies have been airlifted in by the Government. This increases the total number of people besieged in Syria from 212,000 to an estimated 440,000.

This situation cannot continue: 185,500 people are in areas besieged by the Government, despite its assertions that it has a responsibility to look after its own people. The rest are in areas besieged by armed and terrorist groups. The authority of the Council is being undermined. People trapped in besieged locations are becoming more and more desperate. We must be allowed to deliver essential humanitarian items, such as food, nutritional supplies for children, medicines and medical items. Time is running out. More people will die.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners continue to do everything we can to try to save lives, and we are still getting aid to millions of people each month, including through cross-border operations. The pledging conference in Kuwait on 31 March will be an opportunity to raise some of the resources required to maintain our life-saving work. I encourage Governments to give generously.

We also need the Council's continued strong support in the following areas. They should remain strong advocates for compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law; and make it clear that parties to the conflict, including the Government, which bears a special responsibility as a Member of the United Nations, cannot act with impunity. On the issue of denial of access, where parties arbitrarily withhold consent to relief operations there must be consequences and accountability. Council members may wish to

consider the concrete steps they would like to take given the violations of the Council's demands on access set out in resolution 2139 (2014). And on the repeated targeting of health facilities and personnel, the Syrian armed forces, non-State armed groups and terrorist groups must be held accountable for their actions.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, the death, destruction and violence in Syria grows. As Council members have said many times, there is no humanitarian solution to the crisis. The international community must demonstrate greater determination to reach a long-overdue political solution.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Amos for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arabic Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The statements made by some Member States before the Council as well as elsewhere, as well as statements by the Secretary-General himself, continue to stress that there is there can be no humanitarian or military solution to the crisis in Syria. We agree with that suggestion in principal because the humanitarian suffering cannot be ended in full by providing some humanitarian assistance in one region or another. This is despite the fact that we fully understand the need for providing such humanitarian assistance and the important role that it has to play in alleviating suffering in the areas affected. However, we differ with some States in as far as we believe that this suggestion should not be limited to words but that those words should be associated with serious and responsible action and that the matter should be discussed in a holistic manner. This has its own consequences, including the following.

First, we should discuss the main reason for the emergence of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, which is primarily the widespread terrorist phenomenon being supported by outside forces. However, and regrettably, instead of that, some States are attempting to dissociate the phenomenon of terrorism from the humanitarian situation in Syria so as to prolong the crisis and the two issues as separate, with a view to blackmailing the Syrian Government under the pretext of repercussions. This is in addition to attempts to avoid shouldering responsibility, in particular in implementing Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism, including resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015).

Can we call the actions of some States, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, in spending billions of dollars in supporting and financing terrorism, which has been condemned by the Security Council, anything like concern over the humanitarian situation in Syria? Is it not the epitome of hypocrisy, while the 2015 Syria response plan did not receive even 9 per cent of the requested funding and the regional response plan for refugees received less than 6 per cent?

I would like to draw the attention of Council members to the fact that the cost of international staff and their skyrocketing salaries usually comes at the expense of the beneficiaries — those who are benefiting from humanitarian assistance in Syria. We therefore call on the Secretary-General to submit a report on that topic.

Secondly, a political solution should be supported through a Syrian-led intra-Syrian dialogue. As such, the Syrian Government continues to combat terrorism and, in parallel, is seeking to achieve a political solution. It openly and positively participated in the consultative meeting held in Moscow in January, and intends to participate in the second Moscow meeting, scheduled to be held within two weeks.

The Government has also responded positively to the proposal made by Mr. de Mistura, in accordance with the information he conveyed in his briefing to the Council last month, in the hope that such a proposal can contribute to improving the humanitarian situation in Syria. However, the terrorist groups and their driving force — which includes States — are the ones who refused to implement the proposal of Mr. de Mistura. Still some members of this Council refuse to address this negative aspect with the attention and follow-up that it deserves.

The report of the Secretary-General before us (S/2015/168) has many shortcomings and gross misrepresentations. I shall, by way of example, discuss some of them.

We noticed that the report depended in many of the charges levelled at the Syrian Government on what it calls "reports". However, the report is Secretary-General failed to disclose the sources of those reports or their credibility and worthiness. Secondly, the report says that the United Nations sought access to 33 besieged or hard-to-reach areas. However, the United Nations was denied access to 31 areas and is still waiting authorization to access others. I would also like

to say that, making such proposals in this poisonous manner is political and misleading, and that it fails to convey the full picture. The situation is as follows.

In the second half of February, the field offices of the United Nations in Homs, Aleppo and Tartus sent those 33 requests to the governors of the areas directly without the Resident Coordinator's Office sending any such information to the main focal point in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Ministry learned about this later on from then United Nations on 9 March, one month later. This is against standard procedures, whereby delivering assistance to hard-to-reach areas requires prior agreement between the United Nations and Syria. That requires a meeting of the joint Syrian-United Nations commission to discuss the details with regard to requests by the United Nations to provide assistance, in particular regarding then roads to be followed according to the security situation as well as assessing the number of beneficiaries and the distribution points so that we can guarantee the safe delivery of assistance material.

Despite all of this, the Syrian Government was ready to facilitate the operation of the convoys whenever possible, provided that such assistance would not end up in the ends of terrorist groups, in addition to guaranteeing the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

Thirdly, the report states that the Syrian Government is attacking the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in some cities and towns, which refutes some of the naïve assertions made by some of my colleagues in the Council to the effect that the Syrian Government is not fighting ISIS. That is something we have heard many times in the Council. However, despite all of the foregoing, the report of the Secretary-General claims that such attacks led to the killing of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure. The question that must be posed here is how could the authors verify their authenticity of reports in areas controlled by ISIS unless the sources were the Chechen Abu-Usama, the Saudi Abu-Moussab, the Libyan Abu-Suhaib, the British Abu-John or the Jordanian Abu-Abdullah? What adds insult to injury is that the report does not even attempt to discuss the loss of life and the destruction of Syria's infrastructure caused by the international coalition's raids.

The report says that the Syrian Government declared three of its staff persona non grata. But the question that should be asked here is what really is the mandate that the UNICEF personnel are working under in this case? The question I have for those who are quick to criticize the Syrian Government's decision is about the relationships that the UNICEF employee had to other groups in Aleppo. Why would he contact the armed groups without the knowledge of the Syrian Government? Is there any justification for the continued demands of another staff member wanting to know the location of the Syrian army or the kinds of weapons being used in Aleppo? Did the supervisor of those two staff members explain that paragraph sub-paragraph 35 (d) of the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182 requires of United Nations staff working in humanitarian assistance that they obtain the consent, inter alia, of the host Government, in particular here the Syrian Government, the principal party with which they should be in touch in order to ensure their access to emergency areas.

The drafters of the report persist in blaming the Syrian Government for laying siege to some areas and preventing humanitarian access to them. However, the report fails to explain how weapons and ammunition can continue to reach those regions or how come those weapons are used to launch indiscriminate rocket attacks and other terrorist attacks in safe areas. The fact is that those are areas that are under siege from inside by armed terrorist groups, and it is they who are preventing humanitarian assistance from getting access — or, if they allow it to enter, they steal the aid. The report did not discuss the negative consequences for the humanitarian situation in Syria resulting from the coordinated unilateral measures imposed on the Syrian people.

I would like to stress that the Syrian Government is committed to meeting its responsibilities with regard to alleviating the humanitarian suffering of its people. We are willing to take every possible measure to achieve that. We are willing to cooperate with the United Nations and facilitate its work, but such cooperation is not a one-way street. In return, the United Nations must commit to abiding by its guiding principles in providing humanitarian assistance. It must cooperate with the Syrian Government, coordinate its actions with the Government and consult with the Government regarding the various humanitarian situations, rather than attacking it with unconstructive criticism. The United Nations and various humanitarian organizations have succeeded in providing humanitarian assistance

to more than 4 million Syrians every month inside Syria's territory, thanks to the Syrian Government's cooperation.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the people under siege in Syria number not 440,000 but the 23 million citizens of Syria, who are suffering under the various coercive measures and sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States, among others.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite Council members to informal consultation to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.